

I am writing to strongly oppose any loosening of broadcast ownership restrictions. (In fact, I would like to see some of the terms of the 1996 Telecommunications Act reviewed with a discussion of their effects versus the original goals.) Advocates of such a move state that there will be increased diversity of viewpoints, increased competition and so on as media markets are further deregulated. But, they have no evidence to support this, while there is plenty of evidence for the opposite view. The changes that have occurred in FM radio since deregulation, for example, have essentially wiped out local radio programming and ownership. I can remember when there were local FM stations that each had their own flavor within a certain genre, with local personalities and local news and information. Now most are owned by 2 companies, the programming is the same whether you are listening in Denver or Washington, even the DJ is probably in another city.

Instead of advocating policy out of ideological beliefs (which seems to drive the bulk of both Bush Administration and Democratic policy), the public would be better served by real analysis of such proposed changes. You are dealing with things beyond tangible economic data - news, entertainment, public knowledge - that can not be analyzed just in numerical terms. You could call media deregulation a success if a 2 or 3 companies do well owning everything and the industry, once consolidated, seems more profitable than ever. But if the public is exposed to far fewer viewpoints, is more susceptible to manipulation, is less prepared to exercise even basic democracy, then it would be a terrible failure. Already you can see "news" stories on TV that are thinly veiled promotions of other TV shows owned by the same parent company.

We like to promote the dismantling of state media in other countries, but do not want to discuss the cons of market-driven public media left without regulation. Already you can see more diverse views and more quality news programming on public media here and, say, in Britain then you see on much of private media.

Finally I would like to add that if it is true that public comments are by far against this loosening of restrictions and you proceed regardless, what does that say about your relationship to the public you purport to serve?